Who Is Like Unto The Beast

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/46657465.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	F/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Alana Bloom/Will Graham, Jack Crawford & Will Graham
Characters:	Will Graham, Will Graham's Dogs, Will Graham's Father, Alana Bloom, Jack Crawford, Original Characters
Additional Tags:	Young Will Graham, POV Will Graham, Louisiana, New Orleans, Non-Canon Relationship, Sexual Content, Unresolved Romantic Tension, Alternate History, Pre-Canon, Alternate Canon, Hannibal Lecter is the Chesapeake Ripper
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2023-04-22 Words: 4,644 Chapters: 2/2

Who Is Like Unto The Beast

by Palacios1965

Summary

We all know the story of Will Graham as an adult. But what about his formative years? What set him on the path to become a hunter of men? This is one interpretation.

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

> "But I felt like my responsibility was to write something in the spirit of the Thomas Harris literature, and so I'm essentially a cover band, in a way. A band who is using instruments that are unique to my sound."
> -Brian Fuller, when asked by Vulture/New York Magazine about being considered a Fannibal, September 16, 2014

Lane Fitzgerald sat on the front porch of William Addison Graham, her childhood friend, watching as he walked up his long driveway, dogs trotting beside him. In his stride she could see a solemn little boy, then the lanky teen who had risen to every dare she put before him, who had patiently taught her how to load a deer rifle when her father told her she wasn't ready yet for hunting and lastly, echoes of the young man whose own father had been so proud of his badge. It hurt her to see, even from a distance, ways he had changed since then. She shaded her eyes to hide the prick of tears.

"Lane," he called as he approached. "I've got fish thawing in the sink, you hungry?" Unconsciously, his speech pattern began to echo the cadences of his youth. As if he had last spoken to her yesterday.

She swallowed, pursed her lips. "I saw you on CNN," she replied.

"Oh? Did I look appropriately guilty?"

"Actually, I was wondering where you found that hideous coat and tie."

"A Christmas gift from you, if memory serves me. But then, ***memory*** wasn't serving me, was it?" He stopped at the bottom step and frowned. Never the diplomat, he flatly asked, "Why are you here?"

She remembered that his social graces had ever been rough around the edges. He absorbed knowledge from everything he touched and had been the bane of school teachers. He couldn't seem to help himself; he had an uncanny mind and it didn't bode well for his conduct grades when he corrected or contradicted classroom discussions. The school principal told his father that Will could be a great attorney when he grew up. He could out-argue anyone and didn't suffer fools gladly. But outside of a classroom, he had been a child of very few words. His blatantly direct way of communicating put most everyone off…they mistook his inability to soften his edges as rudeness. But she grew up beside him…knew him, as much as he allowed anyone to know him, knew that he often struggled to find bridges from within the workings of his mind to the outside world. No one but her ever guessed that he was deeply

sensitive and his brain lacked the ability to stop the tide of emotions he sometimes absorbed from those around him.

It had never bothered her that he was so direct. Instead, she found it reassuring; she had always known exactly what he meant and what he thought of her and of their friendship. Even when she stopped seeing him as just a friend and more as something else, Will didn't or couldn't spare her romantic teenage fantasies. He wasn't cruel and he didn't embarrass her and that was something her young sensibilities had been grateful for. He spared her feelings and they went on as they always had.

After high school and attendance at junior college, he seemed to find himself. He surprised his dad by moving to New Orleans. He sailed through the police academy and then rapidly rose through homicide's junior ranks. He was dependable, thorough, fearless. He absorbed details and made extrapolations outside of the predicted curves of his cases. He had an eerie ability to see every angle of a crime that left older and more experienced officers in awe. In awe….but mostly just jealous. What they didn't realize was that because of his peculiar empathy, Will Graham could place himself into the heart of a killer. His thoughts flew in and out of the recesses of their savage minds, bright and alert as finches.

He rebuffed efforts of camaraderie; his peers found him to be a hard-ass and that didn't sit well with them. Lane graduated from the academy two years after he did and wasn't at all surprised that despite his years of living in New Orleans and of being on the force, he had garnered few friends.

Nevertheless, she noticed subtle changes in him as he matured. He was more relaxed, more at ease in his skin and he carved out time from his caseload that he didn't really have to spend with her. Maybe it was because he was so isolated and because he was small town and so was she. Maybe he was lonely in the city. Whatever the reason, the kid that had always been so damned literal and factual became slyly flirtatious; he allowed Lane to seduce him. They were lovers before the shine was off her brand-new badge.

The end came when Lane's mother had driven in to spend the day with her daughter and found one of his shirts draped over a chair in Lane's tiny Garden District apartment. "Is this Will Graham's?" her mother had asked. Lane could see the hope spring up in her mother's eyes. "Oh, honey! Why don't you give up this little hovel and get a bigger place with him?"

Lane had snatched his shirt away. "Jesus Christ, mother! Don't start picking out china. It's not like that."

"Not like what? I know you've been sweet on him since fifth grade."

Lane rolled her eyes, shook her head.

"I'm just saying. It wouldn't shock anyone. He's a nice boy."

"Mom, stop. Just stop. If you've been lighting candles to Saint Jude, you better give it up."

And that was the beginning of the end. Will had stopped by that night and try as she might, Lane couldn't erase the awkwardness that came creeping around the doors, over the window

sills. He sensed it…caught it. It was as if Lane's mother were sitting between them at the kitchen table, beaming over a slice of wedding cake. Lane's palms sweated and her head throbbed; she decided to take a horrible risk. What the hell, she thought. Might as well get it out in the open before my crazy mother calls Will's dad or God forbid, calls Will. Within an hour of his walking through the front door, she told him that she loved him. And as she knew he would, Will shut down. He never shared her bed again. Five months later, he left the force, moved to D.C. and enrolled at George Washington University. He went on to become the darling of forensic science at Quantico. Back home, Lane got tired of the corruption and politics at NOPD and joined the local branch of the FBI.

Remembering these things, Lane patted the porch and Will came up to sit beside her. Neither spoke. Despite everything, the silence that lengthened between them still managed to be an easy one, borne of their long familiarity and shared history. Finally, as the late afternoon sun began to slant across the boards and the dogs became restless, Lane answered Will's question. Why had she come, what did she want?

She looked over at him. "I couldn't come for your trial. I was in the middle of a sting. I couldn't get away."

"You wouldn't have been able to see me anyway, you know that."

"I know Will, I know. I still feel bad about it."

One of Will's dogs whined and he stood up. "Come on in guys, its past dinnertime."

Lane rose, brushing off her legs. She followed him into the house. Everything they didn't or couldn't say came to hang in the air between them. Once inside, Lane looked around, taking in the impersonal walls. Where were his pictures of his father, of his many cousins? "Have you lived here long?" she asked.

"Long enough, why?"

"Have you finished unpacking?"

Will's eyes followed hers & he chuckled. "I forgot to hire a decorator. But the bigger question is, why are you here and how did you know where I live?"

"I'm FBI William, I know where everyone lives. I came up here to make sure you're alright. It doesn't look like you are."

"Do not psychoanalyze me," he snapped.

She tried another tack, "Is the Bureau taking you back?"

"I don't think the Bureau knows what to do with me. No one has mentioned an exit interview, but I've only been free a week. I think they're afraid of driving out to ask me if I'll come back. I'm too much of a liability."

In the kitchen, Will shook his head in disgust as he filled and set out bowls for his dogs, slamming down the last two. "Guess I've got some unresolved anger," he said under his

breath.

“You don’t have to make jokes about it,” Lane said gently. “What happened to you was horrible. Anyone would be angry.”

“Well, I’m not ‘anyone’ am I? I got locked up for being a murderer. You know what, I don’t want to talk about it. How about you tell me what’s going on back home. What’s your dad up to? Are you still New Orleans’ brightest and finest?”

“Brightest and finest? *I knew it*! I knew you were mad when I got that job you wanted! Is that the real reason you moved up here?” She didn’t dare mention the other thing….the more personal and more painful reason that she had always suspected was more true.

“No. I went back to school, Laney. I had to bone up if I was going to beat you.”

They grinned at each other, enjoying the old competition. The years fell away and they were fresh out of the academy, ready to take on the world…back at NOPD.

“I’ve missed you,” she whispered. Uncomfortable, Will looked away. There it was, that same undercurrent. The reason they hadn’t kept in touch. The reason Lane could kick herself with regret about; she loved Will and he knew it. He knew it and it was too much for someone like him to bear. He could barely acknowledge people when they spoke to him, much less accept her messy emotions. Why hadn’t she figured that out in all this time? Here she was, not ten minutes in his house and he was unable to look her in the eye. Shit. She had to keep him talking, had to dig them back out of the hole. The one they always fell into.

“Sunny said to tell you hello,” she offered. “Told me she’d bake you a hummingbird cake if you want to come down for a while. She’ll fix up your old room.”

“Your mother always wants to fix things with cake. It isn’t going to work this time.”

“I know….”

“I’m sorry,” he cut her off. “I don’t know how to talk to anyone anymore. Or maybe I’m all talked out. You would not believe the mind games when you’re locked up in a looney bin.”

“Oh, Will. I’m so sorry!”

“I said I didn’t want to talk about it and what am I doing? Talking about it. Let me check on those fish. I’ll cook you dinner.”

“Dinner?”

“Ok, supper.”

Will didn’t own a dishwasher. Stepping into his house was a journey to a simpler time. He didn’t own a microwave either. An old rotary phone stood sentry on a buffet, its days of use long past. After supper, Will washed the dishes and handed them to Lane to dry. Then they went back out on the porch to watch the fireflies. Frogs sang in the distance, a backdrop to the night. A soft breeze was blowing through the trees.

“It’s peaceful here,” Lane said.

Will looked up at the sky. “No traffic, no light pollution. Nothing between you and the stars.”

“I saw your poles, is the fishing good?”

“Almost as good as those redfish we used to catch out at Venice and Cypress Cove.”

“Ahhhhhh, those were the days,” Lane sighed.

“Yeah, they were,” Will quietly agreed.

“Hey, you got any beer?”

“No, but I’ve got some wine.”

“Wine? Oh ho! Haven’t we gotten fancy!” Lane snickered.

Will shrugged, shook his head. “It was a gift from a friend.”

Lane cut her eyes over to him at the strange sound in his voice. A friend? But no more? Someone that he no longer trusted? His tone told her that this had been someone who had meant something to him. She decided not to press further.

“I’ll bring some out,” he offered. “You keep the dogs company.”

He went inside and she could hear him rustling around. He returned with a bottle and two mismatched juice glasses. He poured a generous portion into the glass he handed her. The wine was a deep red, as striking as rubies. Wine was something Lane knew nothing about. She took some into her mouth, felt it bloom upon her tongue. She could feel Will watching her as he poured his own glass and sat the bottle down on the porch floor. “Well?” he asked. His voice was strained. What was going on here, Lane wondered.

“It’s very good, as far as I can tell, “she said. “What is it?”

“A cabernet that you and I can’t afford. Drink up.”

Ok, that was it. She wasn’t keeping quiet any longer. “What is going on?” Lane asked. “You live in the middle of **nowhere**. This house looks like someone’s grandparents died and left you everything and then goddamned AARP showed up for a photo shoot. You’re eating off dishes somebody bought in 1940. And since when do you play piano? What the holy hell?”

“Stop ruffling your feathers. As a matter of fact, I bought the house from an estate. It was already furnished when I moved in. What’s wrong with the piano? I like it.”

“The piano is fine, who gave you the wine?”

“Lane, that’s not a subject for tonight.”

And with that, they were again standing on the ledge, looking down into the hole. Lane drained her glass and set it down beside her. She took out her phone and found she had no service. She shoved it back into her pocket.

"Can I help with something?" Will asked.

"I was so hell bent on finding you, I didn't get a hotel room. Now I feel like a fool."

"You know you don't have to feel that way; you can stay here, Lane. Go get your stuff."

Will watched from the screen door as Lane gathered her things from the rental car. She felt as if her face were on fire and she could not look in Will's direction when she returned. Without comment, he took her bag from her and walked back into the house. She stood on the threshold for what felt like forever, wondering why her resolve was draining away. This was William Graham after all, the quiet, quirky kid who sat beside her on the school bus. And yet, this was also a seemingly broken man who had been incarcerated in a facility for the criminally insane before his acquittal. Was her Will gone? Was he still there, buried within Will's psyche? She squared her shoulders and stepped back inside, locking the inside door behind her. In for a penny, in for a pound.

Will considered her uncertainty. He sat her bag down beside his night stand. Which he knew she'd probably comment on. Who plants a roll-away bed smack in the middle of their dining room? He was fairly sure that his placement of furniture had never been featured in Southern Living magazine. He also knew that those stately matrons had no reason for establishing a clear line of sight when they lay their heads on their pillows at night. The esteemed members of the Junior League of Fairfax or Prince William County knew more about debutante season than the criminal mind.

Suddenly, his heart went out to Lane. He was no longer annoyed at finding her sitting on his steps. He watched her standing there, not knowing what was safe to say or safe to do. She reached up, caught one of her curls around her finger. It was one of her unconscious stress habits, one that he had always found endearing. Tonight, he just found it sad. A sad commentary that expressed the way they had last left things between them. Also, a sad commentary on the humanity he had lost in his game of smoke and mirrors with a killer. He was irrevocably changed and he didn't know how to pick the thread back up that had once wound between them. She had traveled all this way to offer solace to a friend. And that friend didn't exist anymore. An evil beast, someone dark and relentless had invaded his life and taken her friend away. He decided he wasn't going to scare her by letting her know how fundamentally that relentless beast had changed him.

What was Lane to him now? He didn't know. He did, however, know what she was not. She was not Alana, the terribly clever woman who professed her desire for him in one breath and then in the next, shot him down because he was unstable. She was not Special Agent in Charge Jack Crawford, who expressed concern for his mental health but still used and manipulated his talent, pushing him past his limits, again and again. Saints above, she was not Hannibal…that Morpheus who now haunted his dreams with visions of blood and death. Hannibal, who was slowly and insidiously changing his gift from the saving of lives to the taking of them. She was none of those things. Laney, Laney his childhood companion. The tender lover of his twenties.

He gazed at her as she twisted her curls and he made a decision. He crossed the distance between them and grasped her shoulders. Her eyebrows shot up in surprise. He didn't wait for her response; he leaned forward and covered her mouth with his. She hesitated and then soundly kissed him. He tasted like expensive wine, like long humid nights in a tiny Gulf Coast town, like something she still yearned for. She let go of her hair and buried her fingers in his.

"Ow!" he yelped. "I see you still like to pull hair."

She laughed knowingly and reached down, scratching her fingernails below his belt. "I see it still turns you on."

"Kick the tires and light the fires," he replied.

He started to lead her to his bed. She pulled away, shaking her head. "I don't like a canine audience. Can we go upstairs?"

"They don't gossip," he said. "But sure."

Holding hands, they climbed the stairs. The craziest thoughts ricocheted through Will's brain. He couldn't recall the last time he had scrubbed his bathtub. He hoped he hadn't left the toilet seat up. He was embarrassed by the bottles and bottles of pills lined up along his bathroom sink, remedies for the lingering effects of the brain fever he had suffered. *Annnnd*, he hadn't aired out any of the bedrooms since he had been home. It also occurred to him that he had never brought a woman above the first floor of this house. Would Lane be able to tell? Torturing himself, he wondered how many times had she made love since he left. Once? A hundred times? He imagined her naked breasts…sweet and ripe as pears. Offered to someone other than him. The image was so vivid and so specific that it made him wince.

He flipped on the hall light. "I sometimes sleep in here," he said, stopping in a doorway at the top of the stairs.

Lane walked around him into the darkened bedroom. She smiled at the quilt folded at the foot of the bed; it had belonged to Will's great-grandmother Faye. She turned to him and stretched out her hand. He took it, his expression grave.

"Will, come on, it's alright," Lane promised.

And it *was* alright. Their bodies remembered the old ebb and flow, the old magic. There was no cause for hesitation, no cause for doubt. As the hours ticked past, what had seemed insurmountable between them was set to rights. Lane was a tranquil harbor for Will's wounded soul. Her steadiness anchored him. She crooned to him, held him, and at last arched up against him, sharing her release. Afterward, Will rested his forehead against her arm and fell asleep.

He woke sometime before dawn. The room was uncomfortably hot. He carefully climbed out of bed and opened the windows to welcome in the cool, cool breeze. He came back to bed, leaned down and skimmed Lane's bare stomach with his lips, pausing at her navel. She exhaled deeply but didn't wake. He called her name, pulled her onto him. With a gasp, she

opened her eyes. She rose above him, planting the heels of her hands against his shoulders. Without speaking, they began again with slow, exquisite care. It was the perfect balancing act, a path from the past to the present. Then they drifted back to sleep.

When Lane woke again, Will was no longer in bed. She heard him downstairs, talking to his dogs. He let them out to run in the yard. She could smell coffee. She figured even with some toast and a shower, she still had time. She estimated the length of the drive into D.C., planning to catch the seminar she was attending, wanting to be back in time to watch one more sunset before her flight the following day. She headed down the hall to Will's bathroom and was greeted by the sight of a clawfoot bathtub. As she was sinking down into its depths, he came back upstairs.

Sitting on the side of the tub, he took her soapy washcloth and began to run it up and down the length of her spine. Eyes closed, she leaned forward and rested her chin on her knees. After a moment, Will lifted her hair and bent down, blowing warm breath onto the nape of her neck. She shivered with pleasure when he began to drop kisses along her hairline.

"Don't start that," she murmured. "I've got places to be."

"Is that so? Where are you headed?"

"Your stomping grounds at Quantico. There's a search and seizure seminar I'm going to."

He sat up so fast that Lane jerked in reflex. Water splashed onto the floor.

"You don't want to do that."

"What? Do what? What are you talking about?"

There's a psychiatrist there, a consultant. Lane, he's the devil."

"What are you talking about!"

"Turns out I wasn't the killer they were looking for," he said grimly. "But I know who is."

She turned in the bath and faced him. "Are we talking about who I think we are? Are you telling me you know who the Chesapeake Ripper is?" Her scalp tingled…a goose walking over her grave. Simultaneously, instinct and adrenaline pumped through her, like one of her father's deer hounds. Her eyes glittered in excitement, alerted to the hunt.

"You need to go back home. Just change your flight, I'll pay the difference."

Before she could say anything else, Will crouched down and looked directly into her eyes. She was alarmed because she knew what that cost him. Some circuit had tripped, had she not known him as well as she did, she would not have seen it. His hands gripped the tub's ledge. "Lane, I want you to leave. If he knows you are connected to me, he'll kill you. I don't want you to come here again." His voice shook. He took a breath and repeated, "He'll kill you."

What he said to himself, in the deepest part of his mind was this, "Any day now, Jack is going to come out here and ask me to come back and help him catch The Ripper. I am the

only one who can because I am like this demon… '*And they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?'*... I become him; I am his mirrored image. Every time I crawl into his head, I don't know if I'm going to crawl back out. Every crime he has committed becomes my own. Something in him speaks to me. Hannibal won't have to kill you. I will."

They stared at each other.

Chapter 2

PART TWO

In the words of the Orleans Parish Sheriff's office, 'none of y'all know how to drive when it rains.' That was especially true this day. Lane wasn't on Lakeshore Drive five minutes when she was rear-ended. She'd argued with Aaron the night before and to get back on his good side, she'd taken his truck this morning. It needed an oil change and she was even going to throw in new windshield wipers. Hell. Buttering up plan grounded before it even got to the end of the runway. Consequently, she was over an hour late getting to work. Her least favorite person met her at the door.

Trey Nunez was the very definition of the word stereotype. He walked around with a toothpick hanging out the side of his mouth. His exaggerated swagger was so pronounced that it was comical. He was exasperating in more ways than she could count. She wouldn't have interacted with him at all if it weren't for the fact that he could turn on the good-'ol-boy charm and have a suspect singing like a canary before they even knew he'd shut the cage. He might set her teeth on edge, but he was a dream as far as law enforcement was concerned. Even so, she didn't want to hear from him right after she walked through the door.

"You been watching the news this morning?" he drawled.

"I wasn't sitting on my ass catching up with what's on WWL instead of driving in, if that's what you want to know."

"Well maybe you should've. Looks like your buddy Will Graham found the Tooth Fairy."

Now he had her attention.

"I know you had a thing with him back in the day. I'm sorry Fitzgerald, but the way it's shaping up, looks like Graham's dead."

She stopped walking and turned to face him. "Trey, what are you smoking?"

He inclined his head toward a television that several of their colleagues were gathered around. The first sign that something was wrong was the pity in his eyes, the second was the way everyone was studiously avoiding looking at her.

"I don't know who does the thinking for the FBI in D.C.," Trey said.

Lane didn't want to hear this; she didn't want to know. Whatever he said next, she'd always remember it as the moments before she knew Will was gone and how she felt after she heard the news. She held her breath; she'd been holding it for over three years. That day she'd pulled out of his driveway, she'd had the awful impression that she'd never see him again.

“Shut it, Nunez,” someone muttered.

“Some yahoo kicked loose Hannibal the Cannibal to use him and Graham as bait.” Trey’s mouth didn’t have a filter. Or if it did, he never bothered turning it on. “Looks like they left several cops and the Tooth Fairy in their wake. CNN and Fox News are saying they’re both dead.”

“Trey,” someone else warned.

“What?” he shrugged. “She’s going to hear about it one way or another, isn’t she? May as well be here with us.”

Will’s demon….the one he’d been born with, the one that could put him into the heart and mind of a killer and then the monster whose influence he’d fallen under….they had won. They had consumed him at last; Will Graham was gone. Whether he had survived or not, whether his body was ever found or not, her Will was gone. It would be months before she and the world knew the answer.

‘Be ye sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.’

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